tigers; 784

--to eat lying down, for fear of turning into a snake; a story told to encourage children to hold themselve well while eating;

--to eat the liver and the gizzard of the chicken, for fear of becoming mad; a story to make children leave, to the adults, all that is good on a dish;

--to open one's strong-box or one's small box for locking up money, jewels or other valuable objects, during the night; wealthy persons who did not observe this rule would soon become poor;

--and finally, to put an end to this long enumeration, there is the interdict to a married couple to sleep in the same bed on the birthday of one of the marriage partners.

I leave you the trouble, Ladies and Gentlemen, to think about these beliefs.

Among us a wedding present consisting of jewels or of silver 784
plate may be of an uneven number. But where bank notes or objects /801/
of lesser importance are concerned, the number must always be even.

Certain superstitions come close to French superstitions. For 787
instance: a buzzing in the ears signifies: "Somebody is saying something bad about me somewhere." In Laos if someone drops his bowl of rice while eating, this has the same significance. The buzzing in the ears means that the phi (demon) asks you for the way but that you do not deign to answer. That is why you get a hard box on the ear. Then you must answer him: "Thang louang nok ban!" (Follow the great road which passes in front of the house). An itch in the ears means that it is going to rain.

Another French superstition which has passed into a proverb 777
is: "Lucky at cards (play), unlucky in love." Laotians are more fortunate, for they do not have this belief. Among us one can be lucky at play and at the same time lucky in love.

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585 In front of the bride's house, guards make a sham defence of the gate of the house. The husband and his retinue can enter only by making a gift of money or alcohol. When he reaches the stairway of the house, the young man may only climb it after having his feet washed on a piece of stone covered with a banana leaf by the sisters or the women servants of the bride. He must pay for this service, then seat himself in front of the two ritual phakhouan next to his bride, who is already sitting there. The Sou Khouan of the wedding resembles the bassi. However at the wedding there are only two phakhouan and everything in the ceremony must be in even numbers. They are, however, larger and better decorated than the ordinary phakhouan. The marriage is celebrated by two individuals officiating who recite sacramental formulas in duet. Then, after tying a large number of cotton threads around their wrists, the married couple prostrate themselves before each of the aged people and those who are present. They are then led to their room by a lady chosen from among the most virtuous.

[801]

Funerals

764 In Laos as in all Buddhist countries, the dead are burned. However, a distinction is made between two kinds of death, normal death
766 and accidental (drowning, suicide or violent death). The dead of the second category must be buried within twenty-four hours. The story is told of a peasant's wife who, having died in childbirth, was quickly cut up in pieces by the villagers who scattered them to the four winds so that she would not become a wandering soul capable of tormenting the living.

764 [58] When there is a death in a house, the body is bathed with tepid water, then with cold water. It is then perfumed and dressed. Two garments are put on it, one wrong side out, the other right side out. The former symbolizes death, the latter life, for the favorite garment of the dead person while alive was chosen. His hair is then combed and he is shackled with a white cotton thread, for he must not return to the world of the living. The same thread is used to wrap around his neck, to tie his two hands together, and his two feet together. This bond must not be cut, so a knot is made at each place where it is attached. This thread also shows man how illusory are the bonds which tie him to the world. Then the body is wrapped in a shroud. It is laid parallel with the largest dimension of the house, as opposed to the living who always lie in the direction of its width.

[823 342]